

THE COMMUNICATOR

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



NCDHH Calls for Clear Masks & Effective Communication Access

As we navigate the COVID-19 global pandemic, the use of face masks has become the new normal. Wearing a traditional face mask covers the majority of the face, including lips and nose. This can take away from critical aspects of communication for individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. Hiding these features is detrimental to ensuring effective



communication in the daily lives of individuals including in educational and medical settings.

NCDHH has reached out to leaders at Nebraska Department of Education as well as medical facilities such as Bryan Health, CHI, Nebraska Medicine, President of the University of Nebraska system, and state government officials to urge the use of clear face masks as well as a communication plan for educators, employers and medical professionals.

Our agency is available to provide training and presentations on effective communication plans for you and your organization. More information and contacts can be found at:

www.ncdhh.nebraska.gov

Celebrating 30 Years of the Americans with Disabilities Act

John Wyvill, Executive Director



On July 24, 1990 President George H.W. Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act, now usually referred to as ADA. In doing so, President Bush noted the following at the signing ceremony:

“Three weeks ago we celebrated our nation's Independence Day. Today we're here to rejoice in and celebrate another 'independence

day,' one that is long overdue. With today's signing of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act, every man, woman, and child with a disability can now pass through once-closed doors into a bright new era of equality, independence, and freedom.”

As we celebrate the 30th ADA anniversary, we must take time to reflect on the law that has made such a difference in the lives of people with disabilities. The Congressional intent for this legislation was very clear:

“to assure equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities.”

While we have come a long way in our society on how people with disabilities are treated and the access provided, much work needs to be done. NCDHH works daily for greater inclusion, full acceptance, and greater communication access. The unemployment and underemployment rate is still high for people with disabilities. Sadly, discrimination still exists and barriers need to be broken down.

Let's review some of our agency's accomplishments in the last few years while working with our stakeholders and the community:

- 2015 - Passage of LB 287 - legislation to regulate Video Remote Interpreter Providers
- 2019 - Passage of LB 15 - hearing aid insurance legislation for Nebraska families
- 2019 - Passage of LB 247 to remove hearing impaired language in Nebraska State Statutes
- Advocated for the creation of Nebraska state ADA coordinator position and workgroup within State Government
- Raising the minimum EIPA scores for interpreters in school settings from 3.5 to 4.0
- Closed captioning in Memorial Stadium
- Awareness outreach events at Lincoln Saltdogs, Omaha zoo and Scottsbluff zoo

While we have accomplished a lot working together, we still have more to do!

Education During COVID-19

Jessica Larrison, Education Advocate



NAD shared a great article for families seeking accessible prek-12 education. Here is the link: <https://www.nad.org/advocacy-paper-for-families-seeking-accessible-prek-12-education/>. A key part of this is noting just because your child did not use these modes of communication or device previously doesn't mean this year you can't try. Some methods might be better for your child during this new online platform compared to in person.

Your school district may have decided to go fully online or maybe even hybrid this school year due to COVID-19. If your child is doing remote learning, it is important you make sure they have communication access and can understand everything that is happening online like they would in the classroom setting.

If your child uses an interpreter, the school needs to provide an interpreter to interpret for the online classroom as well

For captioning services, the school needs to make sure that the same captioning service is clearly accessible in the online platform as well and is just as effective as in person. The school should not be using automated speech recognition as it is not accurate enough for education

For assistive listening devices (ALD), the school needs to make sure the student can access what is being said through online using their ALD

For assignments that are not conference calls, the teacher needs to make sure they are also accessible to the students. This can be captioning or having it pre interpreted and ready to watch

For your support services you have on your IEP, the school must make sure your child is still receiving those. They can meet online through video conferencing. The school must make sure those support providers have the equipment and tools they need to also ensure the service is effective.

Education is not the only thing that is beneficial happening in a school setting but also the social emotional needs and development. Your school needs to provide opportunities for students to interact with each other while meeting online. If you feel your child is being isolated or becoming depressed, please reach out to myself at Jessica.larrison@nebraska.gov or organizations and programs that provide online events for our Deaf and Hard of Hearing students.

If you feel your child is not receiving adequate services or learning please contact their teacher with concerns and communicate that with your school staff. If that does not solve the issue please request an IEP meeting to go over what changes could be made to make this year more successful for your child. If you are still being denied services and accommodations, request ADA accommodators and when all else fails file a complaint with the federal governments or through a lawyer.

***Follow NCDHH on Social Media for COVID-19 Updates,
Information & Resources at the Local, State & Federal Level***



Ongoing Challenges with Face Masks

Kim Davis, Advocacy Specialist



As the COVID-19 pandemic crisis continues, communication challenges have risen even more at government and private place of businesses, community shopping areas, social events, education settings, emergency and non-emergency first responder services and organization who, most commonly, wear fully covered reusable or disposable face masks.

Our director, John Wyvill has taken an interest in combating this issue and promoting the use of clear window types of face masks and face shields for the purpose to provide access to communication for those who are either Deaf, DeafBlind or Hard of Hearing. However, clear window types of face masks and face shields are also a benefit for those who can hear for access to non-verbal communication.

Places to Purchase Clear Window Face Masks or Shields

Credit goes to Executive Director, John Wyvill and Administrative Assistant, Cindy Woldt for developing the below a list of businesses that sell Clear Window Face Masks or Shields.

Business Name	Website	Notes
Activarmor	https://activarmor.com/store/	
ADCO Hearing Products	https://adcohearing.com/collections/adco-brand-masks/products/adco-communicator-window-mask-blue-brush-strokes	
Cornhusker State Industries	Contact Jeremy Elder, Deputy Director @ 402.471.1255	This is for state agencies only
Crosstex	https://www.crosstex.com/face-shield-152	Face Shields
Etsy	https://www.etsy.com/search?q=clear%20face%20mask&ref=auto-1&as_prefix=clear%20	Hand-made
Faceview Mask	https://www.faceviewmask.com/	Not available as of May, 2020
Flexcon	https://www.flexcon.com/products/face-shields	Face Shields – Nebraska Company
Harris Communications	https://www.harriscomm.com/the-communicator-surgical-mask-with-clear-window.html	on back order
InstaShield	https://www.instashieldusa.com/	Face Shields
Rapid Response PPE	https://www.rapidresponseppe.com/	Face Shields
Safe 'N Clear Mask	https://safeclear.com/new-shop/	
ShieldPals	https://www.shieldpals.com/	Face Shields
Smile Masks by Monica Patrick	Contact by email - monpatrick1@gmail.com	Hand-made
The Clear Mask	https://www.theclearmask.com/product	
The Hearing Spot	https://www.thehearingspot.com/	
The Tailor Pro in Sutton, MA	Contact at 508.917.8776	Hand-made
ZShield	https://zshields.zverse.com/collections/available-products/products/zshield-flex?variant=33951796363323	Face Shields

Do-It-Yourself Clear Window/Panel Face Masks

To make your own clear window face mask, you may wish to seek available sewing patterns through your preferred search engine (such as Google, Yahoo, Duck Duck Go, and the likes) by using keywords “**Clear Window Face Mask Patterns**” or “**Clear Panel Face Mask Patterns**”.

Combating Fog Issues

There may be issues with clear window face masks fogging up during wear. The **Knowledge Base** website has provided excellent information and various handy tips to temporarily resolve these fog issues, <http://connect-hear.com/knowledge-base/strategies-to-keep-clear-windows-from-fogging-up/>.

General Safety Procedures

Lastly, and most importantly, remember to follow safety procedures for wearing, removing and cleaning your mask and washing your hands. Safety procedures set by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

New York & Nebraska Airport Differences

Dillon Curren, Advocacy Specialist



I was born and raised in Omaha, Nebraska and was born deaf. I went to Millard Public Schools and was in a mainstream program from Kindergarten to my high school graduation. For my college education, I went to the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) in Rochester, New York. I was enrolled there for 6 years earning my college education. Rochester is a beautiful city and is very deaf friendly.

The city has a large deaf population, estimated to be near 50,000 living in the Rochester metro area. They have so many friendly companies and organizations who are able to provide the assistance in communication because of the general awareness of the large deaf community. I am back in the city I hold dear and near in my heart, Omaha and I want to bring back some of the things I have seen and experienced to this great city to make it better for the deaf community here.

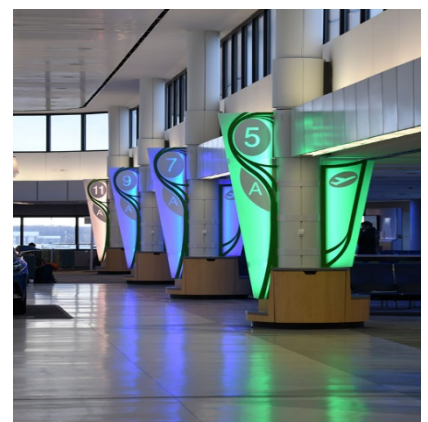
As we start to experience various reopening protocols and people are starting to travel again, the threat of COVID-19 is still very real and we must take social distancing guidelines seriously. That includes 6 feet away and wearing masks in public spaces. Fortunately, airlines are taking notice of this and are not packing their planes to allow for social distancing. With the need for masks, communication may become more troublesome and can cause confusion. That is why I want to write about the Greater Rochester International Airport and what they have done to break down communication barriers. These actions are what we can apply to our major, regional, and rural airports here in Nebraska.

For the basics, Rochester airport has TTY service stations across the airport and hearing/counter loops at all counters for those who wear hearing aids. They also have TV screens in locations on both concourses that are captioned on the screen or have a black bar underneath to caption the announcements coming on the PA. They also have employees who are aware of sign language and may know some.

The biggest accessibility upgrade they have which was installed very recently and is assumed to be the first airport of its kind in the world to have this feature. Every gate now has visual cues using smart color coded LED lighting that is aligned with the flight information display system. They have a color coded pattern display to explain what each color means at each gate. The colors will represent change of gates, emergency notifications, ready to board, or an active/inactive gate. They also added the captioning on TVs and visible announcement visual cues to go along with the color coded LED lights so you are not worried about when do you have to board.

Some of the differences are effective and can help our deaf and hard of hearing community in Nebraska. The only ways that can help is to get your support and your self-advocating. NCDHH, as an agency can only do so much and the impact will be more powerful if we can stand with our constituents to advocate for this change.

If you, or someone you know, have accommodation requests or questions about your rights, please do not hesitate to contact me at Dillon.curren@nebraska.gov



We Have To Do It... So Do It Right!

Kathy Scusa, Advocacy Specialist



Face masks...UGGGGGHHHHH! I know we all hate them! It's hot...too hard to breathe...hurts my ears...can't communicate...they don't work anyway. Those are all excuses! The fact is that the recommendation for wearing masks isn't going away any time soon. The valid complaint here is regarding communication.

There are several clear masks on the market for communication purposes. Please contact any advocacy specialist or the main office if you'd like information on those or information about communication alternatives while wearing a mask.

So, about masks -- they do next to nothing if you don't wear them properly. Walking through stores I observe so many people wearing masks incorrectly. In all honesty, I'm occasionally guilty myself! Even the cloth coverings touted as the "best thing since social distancing" have instructions. Guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization outlines the following mask guidelines. Remember: masks are effective only if they cover your mouth, nose and chin. However tempting it may be to remove your mask for a moment, doing that could expose your fingers and face to the very virus you are trying to avoid.

- Follow the steps to properly wash hands.
- Only wear clean, breathable face masks. Re-wearing the same mask could expose you to contaminants.
- Put on your mask, holding it by the ear loops.
- Your mask should fit snugly against the sides of your face -- no open flaps. But it shouldn't be so tight that it's difficult to breathe through.
- Your mask may have a wired side, meant to adhere to the shape of your nose. Press down on it over your nose for a more comfortable fit.
- Make sure your nose, mouth and chin are covered.
- If your mask has pleats, they should open downward.
- Pull your mask up so it covers your nose, and tug it down so it covers your mouth.
- After you have put your mask on, don't touch it again until it's time to take it off.

Beware of these three familiar mask mistakes:

1. It's too loose. If your mask has large openings around your nose, mouth and the sides of your face, it can't effectively protect you from viruses that can slip through those cracks. Your mask should fit snugly against your face.
2. You forgot your nose. Your nose needs to stay inside your mask -- the virus is respiratory and travels through the air, and you could breathe it in.
3. You put it back on and touched it. You shouldn't take your mask off for a break when you are still in public. It's hot, sure, but it's also possible you could contaminate your mouth or face with any germs your mask caught.

How to properly take off your mask:

- Take off your mask by the ear loops.
- When your voyage into the public world is complete, remove your mask by the ear loops only.
- Don't touch the front of your mask -- it could be contaminated.
- Make sure you hold the mask away from your face as you remove it. Wash, then store your mask immediately.
- If you are not immediately going to wash your mask after you use it, place it in a clean, re-sealable plastic bag. Pick it up by the ear loops to place it inside the bag, and store the bag in a cool, clean place.
- Wash your hands again ... and again ...
- It's become a pandemic mantra -- wash your hands immediately after removing the mask. Wash your hands while you are wearing it, too. Just wash your hands often and thoroughly when you are out in the world and when you return, and you will lower the chances the virus will stick around.

Masks don't have to be negative. Make them fun! There are many websites selling fun varieties of masks. If you are "crafty" get some fun fabric and make your own. There are lots of patterns online. (Google, Pinterest, You Tube, etc...) You can find patterns that incorporate clear shields for easier communication. If you are making masks for children, let them help with fabric choices. Find one that fits you comfortably, choose fabric that fits your personality or mood and make enough so you won't have to wash them every day. The most important thing is that masks will help you stay safe and healthy. In the words of our Governor, "Stay home, stay healthy, stay connected." If you would like to discuss my article, anything hearing related or NCDHH's programs and services, please contact me at my North Platte office phone number (308) 535-6600 or you can email me at kathy.scusa@nebraska.gov. I look forward to serving you.

Nebraska State Fair Update

Cody McEvoy, Advocacy Specialist



With so many events being cancelled or postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, people are wondering what has changed with some of the annual events hosted in Nebraska. The Nebraska State Fair announced on June 30th that the State fair will resume this year but make modifications to protect the public health. This article will share what changes and modifications are made for those who are wondering what the State Fair will look like this year.

The Big Rock Summer Tour concert that includes performers such as RATT, Skid Row, and Quiet Riot have canceled.

Some of the returning entertainment will be modified to follow the most up-to-date health measures. The fair will still host youth events, amusement rides, motor sports activities, and taverns. To keep an update for additional announcements, go to <https://statefair.org/alerts-schedule-updates>.



In One Ear but Not the Other?

Aaron Rothenberger, Advocacy Specialist



Several years ago, I noticed a sharp and loud bit of tinnitus in my left ear that went on for about thirty seconds before fading away. Since then, I have had this short bout of tinnitus about once every month or two, although the ear it occurred in has differed occasionally. I often wondered if this was a sign of things to come. Was this an intro into full-blown tinnitus?

This phenomenon is called Sudden Brief Unilateral Tapering Tinnitus, or sometimes fleeting tinnitus. There is not a lot of research that has been completed on fleeting tinnitus. But I found a pair of studies that were done back in 2011 that discusses the event and gives an idea of how common the occurrence is.

Sudden Brief Unilateral Tapering Tinnitus, as described by the research team, is an immediate perception of a tone in one ear that fades away in about thirty seconds, and seems to have no known trigger. Fullness, pressure, blocking, or hearing loss of the same ear can sometimes be associated with the event. Once it begins, it remains at a constant loudness for several seconds then fades away until it is no longer perceived.

There were 62 subjects for the first study, and 74 for the second study. They found that about 76% of their subjects had experienced a bout of temporary tinnitus, where 24% had never remembered such an event. 20% of the subjects had existing tinnitus. For those subjects, 75% had experienced the event. The subjects without tinnitus had a 78% existence of fleeting tinnitus. The subjects with tinnitus had experienced more occurrences of the event than those who did not currently experience tinnitus. Sudden Brief Unilateral Tapering Tinnitus only occurred in one ear per event. The right ear occurrence was about twice as common as the left ear event. Some of the subjects also had fullness or hearing loss in the same ear as the fleeting tinnitus. 75% of the events lasted 25 seconds or less. A quarter of all the events had simultaneous ear fullness. Finally, the average rate of which the event occurred was 1.2 per month.

I don't know for sure if I am out of the woods yet, but it would seem based on the number of participants that did have fleeting tinnitus, it is a normal occurrence. I have not experienced any further moments of tinnitus beyond my occasional event. There is more research that needs to be done on the subject before we can say for sure. Either way, I felt better having an understanding of what was going on. I hope that anybody else that experiences fleeting tinnitus will understand a bit more based on this short bit of information.

Works Cited: Oron Y, Roth Y, Levine R. Sudden Brief Unilateral Tapering Tinnitus: Prevalence and Properties. *Otology & Neurotology*, 2011.

COVID-19, CEUs, Resources...OH MY!

Sharon Sinkler, Interpreter Program Coordinator



I hope this finds you and yours healthy and safe. We are in some unprecedented times and our work as we know it has undergone some drastic changes in the last several months. Hopefully, you have been able to take some time for yourself. Maybe you're reading that stack of books you've been meaning to get to... Maybe you're catching up on all of your DVR-saved programs...

Maybe you're finally getting to watch all the movies and binge-worthy shows you put on your watch list... Maybe you've taken up a new hobby... Whatever it is, may it bring you joy.

And maybe, just maybe, you're taking this time to learn and checking "earning your CEUs" off your to-do list. License renewals will be here before you know it (current licenses expire on June 30, 2021), so why not get your required CEUs knocked out now? As a reminder, you will need a total of 2.4 CEUs, with at least 0.3 CEUs specifically in Ethics and they must be earned between July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2021.

Here are just a few of the many places you can go to earn CEUs from the comfort of your own home (pajamas and slippers totally optional):

Continuing Education Units (CEUs):

CATIE Center at St. Catherine University, <https://healthcareinterpreting.org/> (Medical and Mental/Behavior Health interpreting)

CEU's On the Go, <https://ceusonthe-go.com/> (web-based CEUs accessible anytime, anywhere)

Deaf Action Center, <https://deafactioncenter.org/> (Webcasts tab)

Interpreter Education Online, <https://interpretereducationonline.com/continuing-education-for-asl-interpreters/>

Northeastern University Center for Atypical Language Interpreting (CALI), <https://www.northeastern.edu/cali/> (Online Learning: Self-Paced Modules tab or Webinars tab)

RID's Continuing Education Center, <https://education.rid.org/> (To take advantage of the Continuing Education Center, you will need to be an Associate, Certified, or Student member of RID)

Sign Enhancers, <https://sign-enhancers.myshopify.com/> (search their catalog)

Signs of Development, <http://signs-of-development.org/>

And if you are looking for some great resources that have been created during this coronavirus pandemic by some brilliant folks, be sure to check these out:

Emergency Access Info, <https://emergencyaccess.info/> (A community initiative by RID with lots of resources and information)

National Association of the Deaf (NAD), <https://www.nad.org/> (coronavirus and resources tabs)

NCDHH

Nebraska Commission
for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing



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